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The paper attempts to analyze the work of the London external degree and its place in the fluid system of higher and further education. Oxford and other universities have traditional extramural departments strictly concerned with non-vocational, usually non-examined, non-degree courses; London University has been serving the majority of England's part-time students. The binary system reveals two approaches: (1) colleges which are supervised by the Council of National Academic Awards responsible for forcing up standards of amenities and directing students into specific careers; (2) the training for a traditional arts degree irrespective of subsequent occupation. Areas of concern are: Technological colleges which were converted into universities are being filled by arts students; the University of the Air might do no more than overlap with the work being done by Workers' Educational Authority, other adult education centers, colleges of further education and the British Broadcasting Corporation. Sufficient investigation has not been done to properly assess the students who will be served by the University of the Air. (nl)

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# The London External Degree and the English part-time degree student

by
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# The London External Degree and the English part-time degree student*

## I

This paper reflects the confusion over higher education in England which predominates in this 'post-Robbins' era. The weighty report of the Committee on Higher Education chaired by Lord Robbins appeared in 1963. It advocated a rapid expansion in the number of university places, on the principle that the supply should be determined essentially by the expanding demand from school-leavers with the matriculation requirement of two passes at the Advanced Level of the General Certificate of Education. This provoked a controversy which in its fourth year still burns fiercely.[1]

The demand, it was recommended, should be met by expanding existing universities and by adding to their number, partly by upgrading the best of the large technical colleges to autonomous university status in the tradition of the provincial English university colleges which had prepared students for the external degrees of London University—as the technical colleges now do—and which were, in due course, granted charters bestowing independent university status. Those large technical colleges already designated Colleges of Advanced Technology should become universities first. The training colleges, as colleges of education, should share in the upgrading by being removed from local authority control and in some cases preparing students for a new degree, the Bachelor of Education.

The publication of the Robbins Report produced a wave of optimism in the larger technical colleges, for the way to university status seemed clear. The success of the theoretically egalitarian Labour Party in the 1964 election augured well, for the party was already committed to reorganisation of secondary schools on egalitarian lines. Yet the new Secretary of State for Education and Science, Mr. Crosland, shattered hopes in these quarters a few months later. Though the Colleges of Advanced Technology were confirmed as Technological Universities and the degree of Bachelor of Education approved in the renamed training colleges—but still under local authority control—the minister decisively closed the list of additional universities and contradicted Robbins by introducing instead the 'binary system'. This curious term describes a divided system of higher education in which the universities continue to receive public aid through the buffer University Grants Committee while other institutions providing degree-level education remain under more direct central and local government control. The Robbins recommendation that the successful Hives Committee, the National

* I wish to thank the External Registrar of the University of London, and his staff, for assistance with material for this paper, while adding that responsibility for the views expressed is entirely my own.

Council for Technological Awards, which supervised technological awards—the Diplomas of Technology—should be expanded to become a Council for National Academic Awards overseeing a wide range of degree work outside the universities, has been accepted. This body, the C.N.A.A., is now busy examining new proposals for degree courses from technical colleges, which have diverted energies into this field with remarkable flexibility. Last year the Government indicated its intention of developing, mainly from these technical colleges, some thirty larger institutions concentrating on degree-level work, to be known as polytechnics.

Thus, in order to concentrate scarce resources in a few institutions the present Government has settled for a dual system of higher education, with the newer and less expensive part under fairly close State surveillance. There is at least a serious attempt to meet the demand for full-time degree places by the growing number of qualified school-leavers. But the position of the part-time student remains unsatisfactory; in practice London, with its external degree system, remains alone among English universities in affording the opportunity for part-time students to be examined for university first degrees.

Though most of the other universities in this country have followed Cambridge and Oxford in developing active extramural departments, these are traditionally and strictly concerned with non-vocational, usually non-examined, and certainly non-degree, courses. The curious situation thus exists that many thousands of students, having matriculated by means of the necessary Ordinary and Advanced level G.C.E. passes, study up and down the country in a technical or other college or part-time at home, perhaps with the aid of a correspondence course, for an external degree of the University of London. Though they may live within sight of another university its services are effectively barred to them. Unless they already have a first degree the course normally requires a minimum of five years' part-time study—some students take double this time—and in, for example, the popular B.A. Honours and General degrees, there is no examination or assessment before the final battery of papers. Many students may thus labour for five or more years almost entirely alone. In this respect England can scarcely be called the land of the second chance.

In other words the provision for part-time degree students remains meagre, for only the London external department, working almost unnoticed and often unloved, is directly concerned with them. The sustained debate sparked off by the Robbins report has virtually ignored the part-timer. Meanwhile, further to complicate the picture, the Government is planning to launch the long-promised University of the Air, by which any aspiring student will be able to read at home for a degree—initially only an ordinary degree—through a system of credits accumulated by passing examinations related to television programmes and linked correspondence courses. This will have the name and, it is hoped, the status of a degree. As such it might be seen as an alternative to the existing London external degrees, and perhaps to other parts of our curious patchwork of post-secondary education—the very terms higher and further are riddled with ambiguity—such as the vocational Higher National Certificate, intended

to be equivalent to an ordinary degree, the liberal adult education of the university extramural departments and the W.E.A., and perhaps the new degrees under the C.N.A.A., if and when these are offered, as it is intended that they should be, on a part-time basis.

So history and expediency combine to produce a confusing, sometimes overlapping, patchwork of post-school educational provision regarded as of degree level; as yet an appreciable number of students still opt for the London external degree, with or without the help of a technical or correspondence college. While North American universities make thorough provision for the expanding part-time market, as described by John Melling in the *Journal of the International Congress for University Adult Education*, 1967, "Part-Time Degree Studies in a North American University", English universities as a body appear to remain uninterested in the near-certainty of a similar expansion here, and content to leave provision for such a market to the technical colleges, to the University of the Air, or to chance.

"Whatsoever may be its future, its honourable place in academic history is a matter of common consent". The tentative doubt cast on the future of the London external degree by the Robbins Committee may be taken to reflect a fairly general willingness to write the obituary to the London system. Yet there appears to be little foundation for the assumption that the demand for external degrees will soon be exhausted, even when, and if, the technical colleges designated as polytechnics settle down to work entirely for their own degrees under the Council for National Academic Awards. With a record total registration of 31,917 on 31st March 1967, there is little danger that the London University External Registrar will feel himself under-employed for some years; he has indeed been reported recently as anticipating that his department's resources will be stretched to the limit, or beyond, in the next few years.[2]

This pressure is not necessarily a temporary phenomenon. No doubt it may be interpreted in part as a reflection of the national pressure on higher education resources occasioned by the arrival of the post-war 'bulge' in universities and colleges throughout the land. Technical colleges offering London degrees have been doing thriving business with eighteen-year-olds unable to find university places despite the expansion of the latter. But the rapid growth of sixth forms and the increasing expectation of sixth-formers and their parents that a degree course naturally follows, render all prediction hazardous. It is commonplace that the Robbins Report, attacked initially for the expansion it recommended, in fact seriously under-estimated the probable future demand. This suggests that the external degree system may be called upon more or less indefinitely to provide an alternative route to school-leavers unable to win access to either universities or degree courses (C.N.A.A.) in the newly designated polytechnics. But providing such a route for school-leavers equipped with two or three usually rather poor G.C.E. A Levels is only one part of the work of the external system. In a brief reference to part-time study generally the Robbins Report notes its growth *pari passu* with full-time higher education and asserts the belief that it must continue to grow, at least until access to full-time courses

becomes easier.[3] But the suggestion which follows, that the rate of growth may then sharply diminish, with perhaps a fall in total numbers after a generation, needs to be questioned closely. The experience of North America suggests that the achievement of higher education rather calls forth an increased demand for more of the same medicine, not exclusively for career reasons. In this country there has been comparable experience recently in the field of liberal adult education. Far from contracting as the need for specifically 'remedial' education has declined, the demand for serious advanced education has expanded among the relatively well-educated. This experience ought at least to cast doubt on the idea that part-time external degrees for adults are becoming a thing of the past.

In other words the implications of university and similar expansion may be interpreted in quite opposing ways. The fate of the external degree system and of the part-time degree student in particular is bound up in a series of large and vague questions surrounding our idea of a university, and of what constitutes a degree, and beyond that in still more elusive questions of social change and attitudes to education; it is no unusual experience today to overhear remarkably sophisticated conversations on trains and buses about which university Jennifer is putting on her 'clearing house form', and which faculties and professors interview only those who have placed them near the top. Almost all we may feel certain about is that there is an increasing expansion in the demand for higher education, and that most estimates prove too conservative. The pool of ability remains inadequately tapped, and there are large numbers of adults, particularly women[4], who merit, but never enjoyed, a university education.

Part of the difficulty is the paucity of information and research in this field. The terms of reference of the Robbins Committee related only to full-time higher education and its account of the part-time student is necessarily restricted; indeed little appears to be known generally about the external degree student, and particularly the part-time student. On the other hand we have already the Council for National Academic Awards, intended, among other things, to relieve the burden of the external degree on London University, and we may expect soon to see form and content added to the idea of a University of the Air. While the substantial work of the external degree proceeds little heeded, and even resented, by those faculties and lecturers burdened with its examining chores, the as yet nebulous scheme for degrees related to television and correspondence and controlled by the State has enjoyed some years of publicity. So far as I am aware, there has been little or no attempt to define the potential market for the University of the Air, and to distinguish it from that for the external degrees of London University, the part-time degrees supervised by the C.N.A.A.—assuming that these materialise—or, for that matter, the advanced work in liberal adult education of extramural departments of universities and the W.E.A. This paper therefore attempts an analysis of the work of the London external degree and its place in the fluid system of higher and further education, in the hope that, at the least, areas of potential growth and contraction may be more clearly discerned.

## II

The University of London is unique. Sir Douglas Logan, Principal of the University since 1947, describes it as, in a sense, "an *ex post facto* rationalisation of the major facilities for higher education existing in the metropolis at the end of the nineteenth century".[5] The federal reconstruction of 1900 followed sixty-four years, since the University was created in 1836 as an examining and degree-giving body, which were punctuated by disputes and enquiries as to its proper function and organisation. From examining students taught at University and King's College it extended its activities to examining students of an increasingly wide range of other approved institutions until, in 1858, the requirement of attendance at an institution was dropped, and the University examined all who presented themselves after matriculating. With the designation of the London colleges as 'Schools of the University' at the end of the century, a distinction was made between 'internal' students at these institutions and all other students entering for the London examinations, who were henceforth designated 'external' students. With only a few and necessary exceptions the University continues to examine all who matriculate and present themselves on the same basis and at the same level as it examines its own students; to this extent it continues to fulfil the description of its Member, Robert Lowe, in 1873: "what I mean by a University is an examining board". And, though with less relish than showed by Lowe as an examiner for Oxford, the University continues to 'plough' large numbers of its external candidates; a major objection to the present 'open arms' policy is that minimally qualified students sacrifice several years part-time on honours courses which they lack the ability to complete satisfactorily, inevitably wasting their own and the examiners' time.

It is worth emphasising this constant theme in the history of the University. Even before the founding Charter of 1836, the first attempt at a University of London, University College, was opened in 1827 as the Dissenters' answer to socially and religiously exclusive Oxford and Cambridge. The University itself was created with the conscious object of affording to those excluded from the older universities, education and degrees in no way inferior in status. It has remained a proud achievement of the University, both before and after the distinction of internal from external students, that all who prove their worth by passing the examinations have equal access to degrees of proven worth. The Robbins Committee described the external degree system as one of the notable educational inventions of the nineteenth century, providing "the possibility of academic qualification for many thousands of people who had no opportunity of entering a university".

Pride in this tradition has probably played a significant part in preserving the external side of the University's work as an almost exact replica of the internal side. Attendance at an approved college is required for the B.Pharm. degree as it is also, normally, for students reading for the B.Sc. Sociology; a few special subjects can be taken only by internal students, for example biochemistry and microbiology in the B.Sc. Special, architecture, Ethiopic and Egyptian in the B.A. Honours, and certain special subjects in part II of the B.Sc. Economics;

the relative scarcity of these exceptions is to the credit of the University, but it does imply a considerable administrative burden, shared by no other university in the country. The evidence of the University to the Robbins Committee on this subject concluded:
"The University considers that for many years to come its External degree system will continue to play a valuable part in the field of higher education both in this country and overseas. It must, however, be recognised that the existence of the External examination system uniquely in the University of London imposes very heavy additional burdens on many members of the teaching staff and also upon the University administration. The capacity of the University to deal adequately with increases in the number of External students cannot be indefinitely enlarged and the University therefore is not seeking to expand its activities on the External side."[6]

There is some-evidence to suggest that unless suitable precautions are taken, a concern for external students may tend to hamper experiment and development within the University for internal students. It is generally required that external candidates should have access to any degrees available internally; this has caused frustration among members of more lively college faculties, and a general hope that the burden might be somehow reduced and the system rationalised and simplified.[7] Teachers of applied science, in particular, observing the expansion of the technological universities, have hoped that their trials will soon be over. Thus the Faculity of Engineering of King's College believes that "although the External degree system has served a useful purpose in the past, the spread of new universities and the establishment of the Council for National Academic Awards will render the External degree unnecessary and that over a period of five to ten years it should be abolished". The School of Pharmacy holds for similar reason that "the demand for continuance of the degree in Pharmacy for External students is likely to diminish substantially or even disappear within the next three to five years". But the School also believes that "the External degree system should be maintained for many subjects for the many students wishing to study privately or by part-time tuition either for their first degree or for other first degrees in additional subjects or for higher degrees". Wye College likewise, while recognising how few students take Agriculture or Horticulture externally, would regret even this small number—never more than one or two in a year—being prevented from doing so.[8]

At the other end of the scale, the London School of Economics points out that "in the Faculty of Economics the burden imposed by External students in various ways is becoming so heavy that there is danger of complete breakdown of the University's arrangements".[9] Economics is already exceptional among the external degrees in requiring a far higher matriculation standard than for internal students, who are further screened and creamed by the colleges of the University, which can afford to be selective in view of the demand for places. From 1962 external students reading for the B.Sc. Economics have been required to obtain passes in three advanced level subjects, two at Grade D, at one sitting, or some other combination of results held to be equivalent. (This compares, essentially, with a normal internal requirement of two advanced level passes;

the difference between minimal and actual requirements and the experience of London's external department with minimally qualified candidates have perhaps been too little studied in debates on university expansion.) Even so, and despite a recent change in the degree structure such that Part I is taken after two instead of three years of part-time study, thus removing weak candidates from the records sooner, the total home registration for the degree, which passed the two thousand mark in 1959 and exceeded three thousand by 1962, has been no more than checked. This year 3,466 U.K. home students are registered for the economics degree. Meanwhile the total home registration for B.A. Honours and General has soared from two to over four thousand in a mere five years; it will be surprising if similar alterations do not soon appear in the requirements for that degree, especially as there is only a final examination after five years of part-time study (three years full-time) with no Part I to eliminate the obviously inadequate.

It is ironic that almost the same criticism is made of the external degree system within the University as is made, on their own account, by institutions preparing students externally. The objection is to the lack of flexibility, of adaptation to local circumstances, which necessarily accompany adherence to the same syllabus as a guarantee of status. In the words of the Robbins Report: ". . . conspicuous as are the standards of the London degree and great as are the pains taken to make it of general value, it is impossible for it to suit equally all the different types of environment in which work for it is done. There can be no satisfactory substitute for examinations set by teachers acquainted with the way in which the students to be examined have been taught". (Those familiar with the history of the General Certificate of Education and the present hesitancy over Mode III C.S.E. may raise their eyebrows at this; most school-teachers, at least, have shown a marked reluctance in practice to do away with external examinations and do their own assessing and examining.) "No one who has witnessed the uprush of self-respect and vitality that came to the former university colleges with their constitution as self-governing degree-awarding bodies can doubt that, necessary as the connection with London University may have been, it is not a permanently suitable arrangement for developing institutions."[10] The Committee on Higher Education went on from this to recommend the creation of a Council for National Academic Awards, to continue and extend the work of the National Council for Technological Awards. This has been done, so that, for the first time, London's burden of providing degrees outside universities is being shared.

Something should be said about the role of the external degree system in weaning to maturity and independence a succession of national institutions. The latest in this tradition, the large technical colleges known in the main as Regional Colleges but in practice increasingly national rather than regional in intake and interest, are indeed in the tradition yet may in a sense mark the end of that tradition, for they form the basis of the State part of the 'binary system'—one wonders whether the author of that term will remain for ever anonymous—and so have been denied the role prescribed for them in the Robbins Report.

Until very recently the London external system served as the main agency for producing new universities in this country. "At home, all university colleges created in England and Wales between 1849 and 1949 automatically spent their apprentice years under the aegis of (the) External degree system . . ."[11] In 1926 Reading joined the ranks of the autonomous universities, following the path of the former Victoria University colleges, namely Leeds, Liverpool, and Manchester, and of Birmingham, Sheffield and Bristol. According to Professor Armytage, the new advanced level technical colleges "even obtained a small proportion of the university population, owing to their cheapness and to their orientation towards the London as opposed to the provincial degree. Paradoxically, the right to confer degrees only after a period of full-time study within the walls seems to have prejudiced some of the smaller civic universities from recruiting the better type of poor student, and the local technical college, with its part-time facilities, often drew off the very industrial postulants for whom they had originally catered."[12] There was an interregnum until 1948 when Nottingham attained the status of an independent university. Consequent upon the publication of the Barlow Report, *Higher Technological Education*, in 1946 the four remaining University Colleges, Southampton, Hull, Exeter, and Leicester, were granted independent status as universities in 1952, 1954, 1955, and 1957, respectively; in each case the University of London entered into a 'Special Relation' arrangement with the College for 2-3 years before independence was granted, an arrangement comparable in some ways with the subsequent 'Special Relation arrangements' with university colleges in Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, and the West Indies. However, in 1950 was established what became the University of North Staffordshire, a university college which was deliberately spared an apprenticeship under the London external system. Since then there have been designated ten Colleges of Advanced Technology, subsequently granted autonomous university status in approximate accordance with the Robbins recommendations, which owed their growth and prestige initially to the London system; on the other hand there have been created almost as many—seven—new universities enjoying not a tradition of work in the London harness but an academic *carte blanche*, and offering in every sense "fresh woods, and pastures new" in such places as Brighton, Canterbury and Norwich. Little wonder if other large technical colleges feel dismayed at the break with a tradition that has helped university and technical colleges to complete autonomy and brought a scarlet procession to the streets of Bradford.

This is not the place for yet another study of the controversial binary system, the present government's alternative to gradually adding to the ranks of the universities those colleges or groups of colleges which have proved themselves in terms of London external and comparable successes, but one or two comments are particularly pertinent to the future of the external degree.[13] The long tradition of promotion through proved merit is not likely soon to be forgotten by colleges at present disappointed by government policy; no doubt some college administrators will remain sanguine of a change of heart sooner or later in Curzon Street and Cabinet, however ill-founded such a hope might be. When the Robbins Committee reported, some seventy-five colleges other than C.A.T.s were offering courses leading to London degrees, and there is every reason to

suppose that the number has grown steadily since 1963. In 1965, although there were over seven thousand students reading for first degrees, excluding C.N.A.A. degrees, in the twenty-five regional technical colleges, there were also over five thousand others so engaged in 'other major establishments', such as the lower-status area technical colleges.[14] While it may well be that the colleges designated as polytechnics will find it in their interest to abandon London external for C.N.A.A. degrees, which permit more flexibility in such matters as admissions and curriculum content, those colleges outside the pale will have a clear interest in retaining the London degree, especially as their amenities may not reach the standard required by C.N.A.A. (One rather suspects that the logic of the binary system will operate in practice to restrict C.N.A.A. degrees to the designated polytechnics.)[15] There is much to be said on academic and administrative grounds for a college running and examining its own courses, operating its own entrance requirements and making its own exceptions; apart from anything else matriculation requirements for C.N.A.A. courses tend to be lower and more flexible than those for, at least, the London B.Sc. Economics external degree. But a college excluded from the charmed circle of C.N.A.A. will probably make all the more strenuous efforts to expand at least its full-time London degree work. It remains to be seen whether the students will also see good reason to work for London degrees, both full- and part-time, as the C.N.A.A. system develops.

## III

The question this poses is whether C.N.A.A. degrees are likely to satisfy that home market, at present over twenty-three thousand strong, whose needs the London system struggles to supply. (This paper restricts itself to developments in this country; the influence of the external degree in weaning Commonwealth university colleges and its service to students working privately overseas deserve a separate study.) Leaving aside the question of whether or when C.N.A.A. degrees will attain status and prestige comparable with those of London University--the reception of the Diploma of Technology encourages optimism but may be of marginal relevance in fields other than technology—it must be asked whether and to what extent C.N.A.A. degrees are likely to supply the needs of external degree students.

It may be as well to begin with a word about the C.N.A.A., if only because the ground is firmer here than in any discussion of the heterogeneous external degree clientele. The C.N.A.A. was established in 1964, replacing the Hives Council, the N.C.T.A., established by the Ministry of Education in 1955 to award the Diploma of Technology for four year 'sandwich' courses—periods of alternating college study and industrial experience. By the time the Robbins Committee reported and recommended widening the scope of this kind of work, and using the designation degree rather than diploma, the Council had

awarded 2,000 diplomas.[16] It is significant for the present discussion that when the N.C.T.A. was set up there were just under 1,500 students registered at home for the London external engineering degree; when the Council was superseded as a token of its very success a decade later, registration for the external degree had dropped only a hesitant 10%. The bulk of this external work was in technical colleges—since engineering degrees scarcely lend themselves to correspondence and study at home—some of which clung to the London system for political reasons as well as teaching for the Dip. Tech., while others would have proved unacceptable to the Hives Council through lack of college amenities. Whether the student will continue to see reasons for taking the old London engineering degree remains problematical; it is remarkable, though, that so many in this most clearly vocationally orientated discipline should continue to manage on a meagre grant while their Dip. Tech. colleagues enjoy an often very comfortable salary from their employers and emerge with a degree acclaimed industrially and academically as, if anything, better than that of the external system.

The C.N.A.A. has the advantage and the disadvantage of inheriting the Dip. Tech. tradition. It invites colleges to submit for consideration full-time, sandwich, and part-time courses for honours and/or ordinary level first degrees of B.A. and B.Sc., for the latter of which earlier students may trade in their diplomas if they wish. In practice the honours sandwich course remains predominant at this early stage, as one would expect. Of first degree courses in progress in September 1966, many of them reclassified Dip.Tech.s, 105 were sandwich, 31 full-time, none part-time; 119 were in science and technology, mainly the latter, 17 in 'arts and social studies'. Of these latter, 12 were in business studies and the remainder in law, economics, and modern languages, studied with reference to their business application. In London degree terms there is no doubt that all 17 would be designated B.Sc. The Council is well aware of the disadvantages of a narrowly vocational training, and by its deeds no less than its publications[17] has shown its concern for "a broad basic education in one or more diciplines of study". Nevertheless it does aim "to cater especially for those with an interest in industry or commerce as a career", and concedes that "some courses may include an introductory study of the fundamentals of a professional specialisation, while others may be designed to meet the particular needs of industry and commerce".

Similarly, though these are early days to generalise about the overall pattern of courses, it seems clear that the Council favours sandwich courses, as reflecting the industrial or commercial bent of their students, and that this is likely to be a distinguishing feature of the C.N.A.A. as compared with the university degree. The Council emphasises the development of the sandwich principle in areas other than technology, calls for a 'critical and modern' approach to teaching, and requires traditional disciplines to be reconsidered imaginatively in their relation to modern society, business, and industry. One can have only praise for such an approach by the Council; but it remains to be asked immediately how far this will appeal to students, young and mature, who seek simply a liberal education in older humanities or newer social sciences, and ultimately how healthy it is that degrees should be formulated round the

relatively transient needs of industry and commerce, even with the educational safeguards emphasised by the C.N.A.A.

The other aspects of the Council's work are of immediate relevance. One is that it has constantly emphasised the value of the ordinary degree as a worthwhile qualification in its own right, using arguments very reminiscent of the Robbins Report; in its second annual report it commented on the emergence of the ordinary degree as an important development, though only 13 of 138 courses referred to there led exclusively to an ordinary degree. The other is the failure of colleges, so far at any rate, to produce acceptable proposals for part-time, especially mature, students, despite the Council's hint of its readiness to waive the normal G.C.E./O.N.C. entry requirements in such cases.[18] It seems that for an indefinite period of time the colleges, busy enough with expansion, new courses, and the massive administrative complexity of working as national institutions under local authority direction, will show no more enthusiasm for helping the part-time mature student than have the universities to share London's burden by running part-time degrees in the regions they are said to service.[19] Nor is it likely that the more successful technical colleges will go out of their way to re-introduce the evening work that many of their lecturers have been happy enough to see dwindle. (There is a world of difference between choosing to take an evening class in another institution for separate reward and being obliged to run such classes year after year where one already works by day.)

At present the C.N.A.A. students number just over seven thousand, 87% in science and technology, 13% in social science, mainly business studies. 79% are sandwich students, none part-time. The Council has every reason to expect a large number of proposals for arts degrees, if indeed it is not already being inundated; yet its courses "are usually of special interest to students who have a particular career in mind". One wonders whether a C.N.A.A. 'pure' arts, or social science, degree is not a contradiction in terms, or, alternatively, whether such career-orientated courses will appeal to the 20,000 students reading in this country for London external degrees.

The fundamental distinction within this external clientele is between full-time students in colleges and those working part-time or at home, whether or not they attend evening classes or follow correspondence courses. This distinguishes those who are working their own way from those enjoying a subsidised place and, usually, a local authority grant. It is not possible to say from the annual *Statistics of Registered External Students* how many of the registered students are in this position at any one time, as the distinction between full- and part-time students in the institutions is made only for those entered for examination that year. But figures for correspondence and private study are a useful guide. Combined together and expressed as a percentage of the total home registration they read: (1957-66) 43, 44, 43, 45, 43, 42, 40, 37, 33, 33. The addition of part-time students in institutions would probably raise these values a further 10% in most years; in 1962 for example, of students actually entered for examination in that year 32% were recorded as preparing themselves by correspondence

and private study and a further 20% were prepared part-time in various colleges, a total of 52%, leaving 48% taught full-time. The interesting thing is the high but very recently declining proportion not in full-time study. (By a statistical quirk we find that of students entered for examination in 1966 only 32%, just under one-third, did not enjoy full-time teaching, although 33% of the *total* registration was working with no college connection at all; the peculiarity is produced by the fact that private students stay in registration longer than those entered by colleges.) Lest this decline suggests the demise of the part-time student, it should be added at once that the correspondence/private study element, while falling from 43 to 33% in a decade, has nevertheless increased, in absolute numbers, from 3,690 to 5,460, an increase of close on 50%.

Thus the part-timer has suffered only a relative decline; there remain enough such students to populate one of our larger universities. On the other hand external students in technical colleges have multiplied remarkably, from 3,275 or 38% of the total home registration to 9,122 or 55% of the registration, in the decade 1957-66. External students in teacher training colleges—now colleges of education—increased from an insignificant 15 candidates in 1957 to around 700 a decade later; it may be assumed that these will in future be catered for by the new Bachelor of Education degree. If these striking growth rates are explained in terms of the post-war bulge in the birth-rate combined with expanding sixth-forms, and a fashion for higher education, this in no sense explains away the problem of the steadily growing body of part-time students. Nor, to judge by the experience of colleges offering Dip. Tech. courses, does it imply any early reduction in the numbers of full-time external students. How far the University of the Air is likely to satisfy the needs of the part-time student now reading for an external degree will be considered later.

The second analysis of external students must be by subjects read. Here also it is necessary to distinguish relative from absolute changes. The most striking relative change is the growth in arts and social sciences, when compared with pure science and technology. Whereas in the early 1950's over half the students registered for first degree final examinations were reading science and technology, in 1957 the percentage dropped to 49. Throughout the last decade it has continued to fall, standing at 34% in 1966, when arts and social sciences constituted the remaining 66%, and 32% this year. If intermediate, preliminary, and first year registrations are included the arts and social sciences proportion is now as high as 75%. (The Robbins Report gives percentages for universities in 1961-62 as: arts and social sciences - 43; science and technology - 57. The external registration ratio in 1962 was 60: 40 the other way.) Yet the *number* of final examination students reading for pure and applied science has risen, if erratically, from 4,210 to a peak of 6,134 in 1965, falling to 5,761 this year. Arts students numbered 1,811 in 1957, rising to 5,700 this year; the figures for social sciences—economics, estate management, law, sociology—are 2,500, rising to 6,705. (Arts and social sciences combined: 4,311, rising to 12,405.) The most striking single rise is among candidates for the B.Sc. Sociology degree: from under 200 before 1960 to 1,600 in 1966. The largest increase by groups of subjects, is, surprisingly, not in social sciences, 160%, but in arts, 186%, over the

decade from 1957. (This may reflect the introduction of stiffer matriculation requirements in the B.Sc. Economics degree, and may further suggest the desirability of a comparable amendent in at least B.A. Honours.) What is inescapable is that rapidly increasing numbers of students are anxious to read for what may be loosely called liberal arts degrees, either within college or without.

One further distinction may be useful here, though it is obvious enough in a common-sense kind of way. It is obvious enough that there will be relatively more full-time students in science and especially technology than in the liberal arts, which represent fewer problems of laboratories and equipment (however hard it may prove to convince arts students that the perhaps inaccessible library must be their laboratory). But this needs to be spelt out precisely in any discussion of external and part-time degree students. Of those entered for external examinations in pure and applied science in 1962 67% were taught full-time. Of the other 33% over half, 23% of the total entry, were studying part-time in institutions, leaving only 10% to work by correspondence and private study. By 1966 the full-time proportion of the larger entry had risen to 82%, leaving 9% attending part-time and 9% in correspondence or private study. In arts and social sciences the 1962 proportions were only 33% in full-time study and 18% attending part-time, leaving 49% who had prepared themselves with or without the aid of correspondence courses. By 1966 the proportion for full-time had risen strikingly, to 57%; those entered after part-time attendances, 10%, and correspondence or private study, 33%, in fact showed an absolute as well as a large relative decline, but it should be reiterated that this reflects no overall decline in the numbers studying part-time, only in those entering in this particular year.

There are then many more students working in institutions such as technical colleges than alone for external science and technology degrees; yet, because of the growth of the liberal arts sector so rapidly of late, liberal arts degree students actually outnumber degree scientists and technologists within the technical colleges. In 1966, for example, of 9,122 registered students in technical colleges, 5,102 were reading for arts and social science degree, 4,020 for degrees in pure and applied science. Thus the most rapid growth-points in the external system are those least likely, certainly least early, to be touched effectively by C.N.A.A. This applies principally to the B.A. Honours and General, but also to the more 'academically', less vocationally, inclined students of economics and sociology. And for the mature part-time degree student the technical colleges —though not the C.N.A.A. itself—find themselves unenthusiastic. This need cause little surprise, for the five or six thousand students lacking all face-to-face teaching are scattered pretty thin on the ground over a wide range of subjects and options, as the National Extension College has discovered through its efforts to bring them together in some way. It is clear that the C.N.A.A. is unlikely, therefore, to cater appreciably for London's part-time students, even if its colleges should make efforts. Indeed, one rather suspects that C.N.A.A. part-time courses would instead call forth a new market among such groups as local government officials, librarians and welfare workers, who might

feel the need for a professionally-orientated degree course in a qualification-conscious society, and who might by the nature of their employment be able to arrange day release without loss of pay.

All this leaves unanswered the central question of why students, and more especially part-time students, read for external degrees. When it was founded "London University was regarded in some circles, at least, as a potentially useful body for testing the abilities of schoolmasters, though a subsidiary means to the training colleges".[20] This is still rather assumed to be the predominant part-time clientele if widened to include schoolmistresses; it need scarcely be appended that those found not wanting enjoy the material benefit of a degree and perhaps good honours allowance to their salaries for the rest of their teaching lives. But this probability and incentive, reinforced by the status anxieties of the non-graduate teacher in a profession which the reformers maintain must become a graduate profession, does not constitute a proof of the composition of the part-time body. It is easier to argue *a priori* who ought to be the students, and why, than to demonstrate who they actually are and why they study. There appears to be no evidence available in England to compare, for example, with that submitted to the Martin Committee on Higher Education in Australia in 1964. This showed that 66% of Queensland's 2,550 external students in 1963 were teachers; for the University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales, the percentage was 81. The sample of 167 students enrolled with the National Extension College is of limited value as the students were from a small and self-selected group.[21] Of these close on half were teachers; the largest sub-groups after teachers (86) were housewives (28), and clerical workers (17), both of which categories leave questions to be asked. The N.E.C. asked these students why they were taking a degree, and it appeared that replies did not fit the categories defined in the Robbins Report as the chief concern of extramural boards—refresher courses for practitioners in various fields, and 'general education' for adults. Though Jenni Grunby does not go on to define what did appear to be the main objects, the replies quoted used such words as advancement, career, ambition, professional status. On the other hand the impression left by another (self-selected) sample of students, those attending a recent week-end economics course arranged by a university extramural department, was that neither teachers nor vocational considerations predominated.

To discover a little more about the part-time external student an analysis was made of the registrations of a thousand such students entered for examination in arts, economics, and law in 1968. Particulars were available of their age, sex, and to some extent qualifications and occupations, but not, of course, their motives, though these could sometimes be inferred from occupation. (One twenty-eight-year-old teacher added a note that he was reading for an economics degree as he felt his good honours history degree was now rusty.) There were clear and predictable differences between law and economics students and arts students, and to a lesser extent within those groups. Over a third of B.A. Honours and 27% of B.A. General but only 10% of B.Sc. Economics and under 7% of LL.B. students were women. About two-thirds of the women

appeared to be married: 8% of arts but only 3% of law and economics students in the sample recorded themselves as housewives.

Half the total were teachers of some kind, but their distribution between subjects was very uneven, for only 16% of the law students taught, nearly half of these teaching in technical and similar colleges, compared with 50% of the economics students, 56% of the B.A. General candidates and 69% of the B.A. Honours students reading the four popular subjects, English, French, geography and history. This means that well under half the total part-time clientele were teachers, taking into account the large total number of LL.B. students. But it does confirm the belief and tradition that the external degree caters particularly for school-teachers seeking better positions; the preference for honours over general degree may be taken to reflect the attractiveness of the good honours allowance in the Burnham salary scale, though it could also demonstrate a preference for this more coherently structured degree. Vocational interest is suggested also by an analysis of those other than teachers reading law and economics. Among those reading law, policemen, civil servants, and local government officials were well represented, followed by various professional and clerical groups suggesting a fairly close career interest; economics students also included a number of public servants in central and local government, and a substantial group of engineers and comparably qualified people in industry and commerce perhaps seeking managerial responsibility. While it was evident that the great majority of all students already held some kind of post-secondary qualification, it was conspicuous how well qualified were the economics students; a sample of 280 held 82 first degrees between them, by no means all in science or engineering.

As to age, while the overall peak for initial registration was the 21-30 age span—those who eventually succeeded would of course be at least several years older—there were differences as between subjects. The average arts honours student was markedly younger than the average general degree student; economics students showed an age distribution closely resembling that of honours arts, but law students were appreciably older, with a peak in the 31-40 span. It was also noticeable in law and economics, where one can distinguish part I from part II examination entries, that the older students proved more able or determined, in other words that the average age of registration for those surviving part I was higher than that of all registrations. For perseverance the laurels surely go to a law student initially registered at the age of fifty-eight and still a serious candidate for examination in 1968 when, God willing, he will be eighty.

At the risk of appearing inconclusive it must be said that generalisations as to motive may mislead. There was clearly a strong vocational incentive for many students, but the exceptions were numerous; it was clear that a substantial minority studied from sheer interest and perhaps a desire to prove themselves against well recognised and challenging hurdles. Since this minority numbers many hundreds in all, and since other social and economic developments are likely to encourage its increase, even the removal of the vocational motive by

other provision, improbable though this would be, would not mean the disappearance of the part-time degree student.

It might be thought that a more clear-cut answer would apply to school leavers going on to study full-time for external degrees in technical colleges. Yet here too there is much ambivalence, if only because the students themselves are ambivalent. At the worst this is manifested in the colourless and ineffectual drifter who has been forcibly fed through G.C.E. A level and goes on to college because it is what his parents expect, what everyone else around him does, or the best way of avoiding work and decisions. His rather brighter brother may be encountered in any university, along with his sister (if she is not obliged by the severity of the competition to go to a college of education instead); her motive, to choose a husband, may however be more positive. But at its best this ambivalence may reflect a real self-awareness of immaturity, a real concern to find out more about the world and so of himself, on the part of the able and serious student. If it is to postpone taking a job, or to get a better job in the end, it is also from a genuine involvement with an academic discipline, and from a need to know more and develop more before knowing what kind of job to take, what kind of life to lead.

To write thus is of course to write on impression and more or less accidental personal experience, for little appears to be known, as distinct from assumed, of the motivation of undergraduates, though we do at least know their age, sex, and background, which is scarcely true of the mature part-time student. But in one sense it matters less with the university undergraduate, so long as internal courses are essentially liberal and as far as possible open-ended. It is of more immediate relevance to the student entering a technical college. He may be faced with a choice between the long-standing provisions of the University of London for admission as an external student, offering without any distinction whatsoever "an encouragement for pursuing a regular and liberal course of education", and a new-style C.N.A.A. degree which is tailored to the needs of a certain industrial or commercial concern by a college working hand-in-glove, as is the ideal situation, with local industry and business. (Lest this appears to suggest too crudely commercial a character in the large technical colleges it may be added that the only regional college omitted from the provisional list for designation as polytechnics last year was that in Stoke, which has been criticised as being too closely tied to local industrial needs, too 'monotechnic'.)[22]

It will matter still more if, in a few years' time, the student entering the State sector of the 'binary system' has to choose between a college on which fortune and Curzon Street have smiled, which enjoys reasonable facilities, library, and staff-student ratio, and which offers degrees supervised by an educationally enlightened C.N.A.A. responsible for forcing up standards of amenities in the college, yet directs the student firmly and immediately into a specific career, and a college which has failed to convince of its modernity, has attracted little investment and so has meagre resources, yet affords an opportunity to read for a traditional liberal arts degree irrespective of subsequent occupation. It is my impression that this is where the binary system is leading.

It is also my impression, or perhaps I should say faith, that many worthy students, both eighteen-year-olds and adults, will continue to seek a liberal education. Whether the country can afford to provide them with it, at least full time, I do not propose to attempt to answer here; as to whether the C.N.A.A. can see its way to steering genuinely liberal and modern arts/social science degrees through the pitfalls of D.E.S. and the Treasury, I am at once hopeful and doubtful. That such new degree courses are needed is suggested by the fundamental questioning of disciplines and courses that is taking place in established universities, London included, and by the organisation of faculties and courses in the newly founded universities; whether the philosophy of the 'binary system' will allow such developments within the humanities departments of the new polytechnics remains to be seen.

## IV

It might be argued that the Government is hastening to provide for this very need, by planning liberal arts degrees through the medium of television and radio, and, in addition, "correspondence courses of a quality unsurpassed anywhere in the world", reinforced by residential courses and tutorials.[23] Hastening is perhaps not the right word, since it is now three and a half years since the present Prime Minister outlined the University of the Air idea, and two and a half years since he took office. However, such a scheme, to be effective, would clearly require much preparation; if there is a criticism it is less for the subsequent delay than for the premature announcement, since there appears to have been little study of who the students will be, and how they will differ from or be drawn from the present London external part-timers. Nor for that matter, if one crosses the somewhat artificial liberal/vocational divide to view the question from the position of non-vocational liberal adult education, is it clear how or whether University of the Air students will differ from those attending tutorial and extension classes already. (And since extramural teachers are peripatetic, the demand for liberal adult education is already, on the whole, being provided for by face-to-face teaching where it is clearly articulated.)

The 1966 White Paper is unconvincing on this point: "Nor would (University of the Air) courses conflict in any way with teaching now provided in W.E.A. and other adult education centres, colleges of further education or on B.B.C. and I.T.A. educational programmes. On the contrary, those who left school at an early age would have an added incentive to equip themselves by such means for higher study." If this implies that adult education is concerned exclusively, or principally, with the educationally under-privileged, the school-leaver, it is either totally wrong or at least ten years out of date. If the present tutorial class student is supposed to graduate to the courses of the University of the Air the calibre of the latter will need to be far other than is implied by the scheme as outlined in the White Paper. It is particularly odd that D.E.S. rather than

U.G.C. control, and 'firm central control' at that, should be justified on the ground that the University of the Air's activities will not be confined to degree work. So while the university extramural departments generally strive to restrict themselves to work of a university standard, their ex-students are to move on to supposedly higher courses run by a mixed-level authority consciously denied the status of U.G.C. control.

More needs to be said about standards and status. The London external degree sets matriculation requirements at or above those demanded internally; even so, it is worried by the high drop-out and failure rates of students in colleges as well as those working part-time. In arts, for instance, this is true at honours still more than general level, and the External Registrar's Department does what it can to induce students to enrol for general rather than honours degrees. Yet enrolment for the honours degree remains high, despite the classical matriculation requirement in most subjects: in the last six years the numbers registered at home for final examinations have risen in the general arts degree from 880 to 2,379, and in honours from 1,123 to 2,484. (The social science degrees, all honours degrees, have proved similarly popular, see above.) The C.N.A.A., like its predecessor, sets matriculation requirements essentially the same as in the universities, and seeks to be scrupulous about conditions and amenities in the colleges, at least as far as its sense of reality will permit. The University of the Air is to lack nothing in status: "from the outset it must be made clear that there can be no question of offering to students a make-shift project inferior in quality to other universities". Other universities? Yet "the degree course should be of general type", at least initially, it "might consist of five subjects, two at major and three at minor level", including "subjects of contemporary social, industrial and commercial importance; basic subjects like English, mathematics and foundations of science; and a range of cultural subjects"; there are to be no matriculation requirements, and the degree may be completed, by a system of accumulated credits, in four years, one year less than the general London degree. It is difficult to believe that this can produce degrees of anything like comparable status with anything that has hitherto carried that designation in this country, or that academic standards can be 'carefully safe-guarded'. Its only real asset appears to be one of morale; continuous assessment is certainly more helpful than several unassessed years in the wilderness followed by a single, daunting, final examination.

Such a degree can have little appeal to the large numbers working full- or part-time for external honours degrees, though they may well look in on certain programmes or enrol for certain parts which coincide with their own work. If it is catering for an existing market at all it would appear to make its appeal to the student in adult education of a liberal kind, who may be working at or above that level, but be glad enough to combine his, or perhaps more likely her, existing interest with a paper qualification at the end. It is unlikely to engage seriously the existing part-time degree student. It is perhaps more likely to call forth an entirely new 'degree body', people who wish to systematise the education they already receive from intelligent viewing. If so, this would be an entirely commendable development in an increasingly affluent and leisured

society. But whether such words as university, hitherto embracing an element of residence, and degree, hitherto including a matriculation requirement, are appropriate, is another matter. One rather feels that the Association of University Teachers, in its December 1966 Council Meeting, might have extended its support for the National Extension College but strong deprecation of "the misleading use of the word 'University' in its title" of 'Open University' to embrace the University of the Air in precisely the same terms.[24]

This is not to imply a general condemnation of correspondence courses and television in education at degree or any other level. Correspondence courses will continue to help students unable to attend colleges, and are also taken, sometimes far from helpfully, by those who do attend, part- and even full-time. If N.E.C. can improve the quality of such courses, and supplement them with short residential courses at universities, so much the better, for I cling, from conviction as well as professional interest, to a belief in the advantages of face-to-face teaching at all levels. Television may indeed make for better teaching and attract new adult students in some subjects and at certain levels.[25] But I remain sceptical of the lasting educational value of even, say, thirty minutes of a brilliant lecturer and gifted teacher such as A. J. P. Taylor, beyond the interest aroused and the awareness stimulated within the existing framework of serious television. T.V. can probably serve as little more than a shop window for the mature study of the liberal arts, and may be positively stultifying if considerations of cost lead to the preservation and production of old lectures in subsequent years. This means that the serious work will continue to be done, as in the past, by the student who struggles with his books, his essays, and, as far as possible, with tutor and fellow-students. If, moreover, the University of the Air is a calculated device to relieve the pressure on arts faculties and technical college general studies departments, though it may fail to satisfy the better (usually honours) liberal arts student, it will inevitably attract or create a market, perhaps of intelligent housewives; it would be intolerable if after all the publicity and expenditure, only very few degrees were awarded, so it is safe to assume that awards will be made in sufficient numbers to justify the outlay, whatever the nature of the market and the standard reached. But it remains a pity if, as appears probable, the University of the Air is launched without reference to or analysis of the London external market, for it is likely thus to add yet another ingredient to the confused, *ad hoc*, overlapping mixture of higher and further education in England, further confusing rather than simplifying.

There is one other point. Higher education for the time being is to be planned and expanded in terms of an autonomous, or university, and State, or C.N.A.A./ polytechnic, 'binary system', separate but, we are told, equal. (Non-designated technical colleges evidently remain under local authority control, offering what degree courses they can manage but classified as further rather than higher.) The University of the Air clearly belongs to the state sector and is to be kept under firm central direction, though one assumes its degrees will eventually be accorded official parity with other degrees, and the universities will be confronted with a crisis of recognition more serious than that currently experienced in some quarters unhappy about C.N.A.A. degrees. This may be looked at

in two ways. First, from a governmental and political viewpoint, if people want degrees, the Government has the means at hand and under its direction to expand the supply as it thinks fit; this might be done through its control of the polytechnics and more directly through oversight and direct administration of the University of the Air. It can be done only less efficiently and indirectly with the universities, so long as they are buffered by the U.G.C., though modern costing techniques will make pressure, direction, or control more apparently defensible. Second, the Government is offering to do nationally what universities have failed to do provincially, to arrange for people living at home and working to obtain degrees. It is perhaps a matter for regret that the universities have not bestirred themselves to find out whether their statutes give them power, if they wish to exercise it, to admit external students to examinations for award of their own first degrees; their collective contribution is limited to occasional short residential courses for London students, provided by the more active extramural departments. It would be surprising if this were seen by those burdened with administering London's external system as much more than a sop for troubled consciences.

Yet the university extramural departments alone could do little more. Their position is in any case ambiguous, as they enjoy the mixed blessing of an ear-marked State grant, which sets them apart in one way from internal departments.[26] More important, their terms of reference relate to liberal adult education, and this has by and large meant non-examinable and non-vocational education. Though it might be argued that a liberal arts degree is in fact 'liberal adult education', it is, or was, for the universities, not their extramural departments, to advance this theme. The example of North American part-time degrees taught extramurally is indeed none too encouraging for a strongly vocational, sometimes anti-educational, tendency has been observed in such work there. The case for part-time degrees run by existing extramural departments is by no means clear or simple. But the present alternative gives no cause for satisfaction. It is that the Government is stepping in to the vacuum left by the universities in their provinces, while they recruit and operate largely on a national level. The Government is to create a national State 'University' which is to have a number of regional centres, thereby duplicating the present network of 'Responsible Bodies'—W.E.A. district offices and university extramural boards. These existing agencies are not in themselves thought adequate for the new national university; it is ironic that their grant terms in fact rule them out from direct degree work at present, and the D.E.S. is to establish a new network with which it is hoped the existing agencies will co-operate. If the universities are as serious in their concern for independence as recent events would lead one to believe, it is a pity that they are allowing an unknown but, to judge by North American experience, potentially powerful factor, provision for the future part-time degree student, to pass, by default, to the State.



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